















# HEBREW MUSIC





TRUMPETS (*HATSOTSEROTH*) TAKEN FROM HEROD'S TEMPLE AS SHOWN ON RELIEF ON  
THE ARCH OF TITUS

# HEBREW MUSIC

A STUDY AND AN INTERPRETATION

*By*

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*To Ernest Bloch*

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I

## PRELUDE

**I** HEAR a nation singing. I see men, women, children, each working at his own little task, all combining in the monumental labor of building a nation. I see people with sweat on their brows—the honest sweat of labor, with hands wrinkled and backs stooped by excessive toil.

“The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing as he makes ready for work, or leaves his  
work.

The woodcutter’s song, the ploughboy’s on his way in the  
morning, or at noon, intermission or at sundown,  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at  
work,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious song.”

Such a spirit which made America—the healthy, busy, bulging America of the middle nineteenth century—so precious to Walt Whitman, makes Israel so noble to us. It is the impassioned spirit of a nation of men, buried in mud and mire, toiling with incessant and indefatigable energy, but singing as it works; working, not for its own material gain, but for the sake of a roseate ideal; working industriously, zealously, inspiredly—never, perhaps, to reap the full fruition of its labors, but working nevertheless because the future will certainly profit by it. And while



it labors, with stooped back and perspiring brow, a nation is singing with quivering voice. The nation is Israel, singing as it rebuilds Palestine.

Recently, a slim volume of songs which are sung most frequently in modern Palestine was published in this country.<sup>1</sup> The book contains some religious songs and some folk-music; some profoundly serious and often poignantly sorrowful music and some whimsical and facetious bits. This, certainly, is not the first book of its kind but it neatly epitomizes and interprets a nation. "As I stood in the *Emek*—the valley surrounded by the hill of Carmel, Gilboa and Galilee," writes Miss Shomer-Rothenberg in her introduction, "and listened to the singing of the Chaltzim as they worked, I wondered how I could bring back with me to America a bit of the courageous spirit, the inner happiness of these workers and builders of Palestine! So I collected the songs that were on their lips." And in these songs do we perceive the spirit of a race—a spirit which is ever proud and with head raised high; a spirit which even two thousand years of exile, two thousand years of persecution and pain, could not subdue; a spirit which is perpetually aglow and which neither time nor tide can extinguish.

Such songs do the pioneers sing as they rebuild Palestine. And it is only fitting and proper that Palestine be rebuilt with song. For music has been and still is inextricably bound up with the history of the Hebrew race. No other nation or creed has placed music upon so important a level. Music to the Hebrews was and is an inseparable part of

<sup>1</sup> *Songs Heard in Palestine*, collected by Anna Shomer-Rothenberg. Bloch Publishing Co.

religion, an inseparable part of life. Music has been the lifeblood of the Hebrew race. . . .

Significant though the rôle of Hebrew music is in the religion of today, its rôle in Biblical days was infinitely more significant. Infinite were its functions, then! The ancient Hebrews realized the plasticity of music in expressing poetical ideas and so they inevitably linked music with divine prophecy. When Samuel, anointing Saul as king, instructs him to meet in the valley a group of prophets, he does not forget to mention that these prophets carry with them timbrels and cymbals and harps.<sup>2</sup> Prophets they are, but evidently musicians too! Later on in the Bible, Elisha prophesies the destiny of Jeroboam's siege—but not until he has summoned musicians to play for him.<sup>3</sup> Music, consequently, was the soul of prophecy. It was the link between the celestial and the mundane; the bridge between the earthly and heavenly spheres.

It is a well known fact that the ancient Hebrews had a college, or a school, of prophets. Is it too much to assume that music was also taught in these schools and that, as a result, ancient Hebrews had a systematic curriculum of musical pedagogy?

But ancient Hebrew music had more functions than that of prophecy. We know, for example, that the arrogant and stately music of the trumpets was employed for military uses and that much of the success of Hebrew troops was due to just such music. Joshua conquered the walls of Jericho with seven blasts of trumpets.<sup>4</sup> Jeroboam was conquered only because the blare of the trumpets of the

<sup>2</sup> I Sam. x: 5.

<sup>3</sup> II Kings iii: 15.

<sup>4</sup> Joshua vi: 16.

priests instilled fear into the hearts of his troops.<sup>5</sup> Most fortunately, music has lost, with time, this more savage mission.

Nor have I, as yet, mentioned music's most important functions in ancient Hebraic days. A celebration meant for these ancient Hebrews—as its means for us today—music and dance. Moses, upon delivering the children of Israel from the iron claws of Egyptian bondage, immortalized the event with song—the first great Hebrew song in history, and, probably, the first song in the history of music—as Miriam accompanied him with the soft voices of harps and the rhythmic force of timbrels.<sup>6</sup> The golden calf was proclaimed with music.<sup>7</sup> And when Israel, at last, found the Promised Land and flourished there, it definitely associated music with every form and every event of rejoicing. The vanquished Sisera was hymned by Deborah, the prophetess, in a <sup>10</sup>psalm of culminating joy.<sup>8</sup> When David slew Goliath, “the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul with timbrels, with joy and with three stringed instruments. And the women sang to one another in their play and said: ‘Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands!’”<sup>9</sup> Feasts, of course, were always aglow with music and it was against this that Isaiah cried when he burst out with: “And the harps and the <sup>2</sup>psaltery, the tabret and the pipe and wine are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord.”<sup>10</sup>

Music, consequently, was ancient Israel's voice to express the joy that quivered in its heart. Israel scrupulously

<sup>5</sup> I Sam. xviii: 23.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus xxxii: 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> I Sam. xviii: 7.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus xv.

<sup>8</sup> Judges v.

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah v: 12.

avoided expressing sorrow in its music, and sorrow slipped into it only unconsciously and in unguarded passages.<sup>11</sup> It seems as if they believed in ancient times that music could only express the happiness of life. Can this, then, be the reason why Israel did not create any truly sublime music? For how can truly sublime music have its roots deeply embedded in joy rather than sorrow?

We must not forget that music was likewise linked with religious services, just as it is linked with our religious services today. Music, we learn from Amos, was a regular part of every sacrifice and of religious services, for, in denouncing the current worship of the Hebrews, he exclaimed: "Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs; and let Me not hear the melody of thy psalteries. But let justice well up as waters."<sup>12</sup> In the Second Book of Chronicles we even learn that the "Levites, who were there, were singers all of them, even Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and their brethren, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals and psalteries and harps."<sup>13</sup> Even long before Amos we find the Lord telling Moses that the "sons of Aaron" shall "blow the trumpets."<sup>14</sup> Music, then, had been relegated to the Levites. Can anything be more conclusive of music's importance among the Hebrews in ancient times?

In the days of Agrippa II, even greater distinction was accorded music. The singers were permitted to wear the

<sup>11</sup> The reader must be reminded that I am speaking here only of ancient Hebrew music. True, I know that there are one or two dirges in existence from Biblical days, but what are two dirges in comparison with the mountain of music with joy as its central theme? I am, therefore, justified in making the statement that ancient Hebrews avoided expressing sorrow in their music.

<sup>12</sup> Amos v: 23.

<sup>13</sup> II Chron. v: 12-14.

<sup>14</sup> Numbers x: 8.

long, white, holy garments of priesthood. With that stroke did the "heavenly maid" definitely become the bride of our religion.

And so, the ancient Hebrews had placed music upon a supremely significant level—upon a position so high that it was second only to the religion itself. It was correlated with divine prophecy—since it is the only possible language that could express celestial messages; it was the inspiration for spirited victories on the battlefield; it was a solace and rest for tired and troubled minds;<sup>15</sup> it was an inseparable part of the religious services and the voice for every possible celebration and for every possible utterance of joy.

With the passing years, Israel had undergone many unforgettable experiences. It had lost its land and it had wandered like a pale, lost ghost among all the hostile nations of the world. It has been hated, bitterly attacked and persecuted; it has had its little bits of happiness and its overwhelming measure of misfortune and sorrow. But through all the hectic times and tides through which it has passed, Israel has managed to survive and it survived with head raised high and with spirit undaunted. The religion is still slavishly followed by millions of Jews. Israel, we know, lives and so does its music.

During these years, music, with the other races, has slipped to lesser importance, even to a negligible position. But with the Hebrews it is still of vital and undiminished importance; of an importance unique among the countries and the races of the world. Our music, today, contains our

<sup>15</sup> "And it came to pass on the morrow that an evil spirit from God came nightly upon Saul and he raved in the midst of the house; and David played with his hand, as he did day by day."—I Sam. xviii: 10.

religion; our religion contains our music. Both are still inextricably linked with one another as they were in the days of Israel's efflorescence in Zion. Every good Hebrew, today, knows and loves Hebrew music; it is on his lips as often as Hebrew learning is. Every good Hebrew sings almost perpetually. He sings softly to himself as he pores over and studies his Talmud, crooning a Hebrew melody to the words he is trying so painfully to impress upon his mind. He sings as he teaches his children their Hebrew lessons, as though he cannot disassociate words from music. He hums in reverie, in sorrow or in joy. When he goes to the Synagogue, three times a day, he sings the prayers there and the Psalms and the hymns; when he comes home he sings his blessings over the meals he has just eaten. Mothers sing Hebrew folk-songs to their children on their laps who, in their turn, are to sing the self-same songs to their offspring. Fathers sing portions of the Bible, each week, to their growing sons. And then, how can any good Jew celebrate the holy Sabbath or the holy days better than by gathering his wife and children about the dinner table and by having them all join their voices in singing that endless mine of Hebrew music, *zmiris*?

Since music has played so significant a part in the life and history of the Hebrew race, it is only fitting and proper, therefore, that it be given a careful and comprehensive study. Through the history of music we can learn the true Hebrew race of the past and the present. If you would know the heart of Israel then look into the innumerable pages of the Bible, the Talmud and the voluminous histories. But if you would catch a glimpse of Israel's soul, then you must look at and listen to its music.

## II

# THE BEGINNINGS OF HEBREW MUSIC

**T**HE seventh generation produced the world's first musician.

"And Adah bore Jabal . . . and his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and the pipe."<sup>1</sup> Music, consequently, made its appearance almost at the very birth of human life. But we must not assume that its position at that time was a very exalted one. After the above cursory mention of Jubal, as the father "of such as handle the harp and the pipe," the Bible—at least in Genesis—is strangely reticent in respect to music. No sign of the existence of song or chant do we find within its pages for more than twenty-five chapters. It may seem even, to the casual reader, that music had been suddenly and mysteriously obliterated; perhaps, even submerged under the titantic flood. Yet, despite the fact that music receives no mention for so long a space of time in Genesis, there can be no doubt that it existed—existed, if not flourished. True, music did not occupy a very important position, serving, perhaps, merely as a decidedly pleasant outlet for emotions; true, also, that it was yet aboriginal, constituting merely a plastic, rhythmical chant without any defined melody. But it existed—of that there can be no doubt. The casualness with which music

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iv: 20-21.

is mentioned—when, at last, it is mentioned in Genesis—clearly shows us that it must have been regarded as much a matter of everyday activity as drinking and eating were. When Laban upbraided Jacob for stealing from him, he said: “Wherefore didst thou flee and secretly outwit me; and didst not tell me that I might have sent thee away with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harps?”<sup>2</sup> It is quite apparent, therefore, that the art of music was already in popular use; that it already had a mission as an expression of human emotions.

Just as the patriarchs of the Bible were primarily a pastoral race, so their music is purely of a pastoral nature. Almost certainly it was a free-flowing naked melody, blown aimlessly through the mouth of reeds. Biblical Israel had the heart and the inspiration to create music; but in technical skill it was deplorably deficient. It was young in the science of music, so young, in fact, that its fragmentary melodies would seem to us today as mere scraps of an incoherent tune. Not until Israel was to acquire the technique could it hope to create a music of depth and beauty.

That science and skill the Hebrews were to acquire in Egypt—in those flourishing days when Joseph was a dignitary and in the years, immediately after Joseph’s death, when the fate of Israel in Egypt was yet a happy one. Egyptian culture was then at its very zenith and its music, comparatively, was in an amazingly developed stage. For one, it played at the time as significant a rôle in the life of the Egyptians as it was to play in the life of the Hebrews in later years. In every walk of Egyptian life music was prominent and significant. The wealthy had special staffs

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxxi: 26-27.



of musicians to create and to perform for them. The kings and high officials were never without their staff of musicians. Every Egyptian celebration, every rejoicing, every feast was commemorated with music, and the sumptuous banquets of the rich had music especially composed for them and performed while the men and women were eating and drinking. Religion, finally, was linked with music. There were hymns for sacrifices and sacred dances too. The priests were musicians and their services to the gods constituted musical utterances. Moreover, ancient Egypt had its orchestras; it had, in its own primitive fashion, a conductor; it had a definite scale for the melodies and already experimented with the elements of harmony, having something of a definite musical technique already; it had tremendously developed musical instruments.<sup>3</sup> In such an environment, Israel studied its musical lessons; it was here that it acquired that technique which was responsible for its high and overbrimming musical inspiration.

Israel entered Egypt musically impotent. Their pastoral melodies were primitive and shapeless; their instruments were few and undeveloped. They had the inspiration but no means of expressing it in developed musical forms. And this same nation left Egypt with song vibrating on its lips. After passing safely through the Red Sea and after having, at last, been delivered from the relentless claws of Egyptian slavery, Moses and the other Hebrews joined in a pæan of praise to God. That praise was the first song to be found in the Bible, the first song in the history of Hebrew music and, probably, the very first great song in all of music.

<sup>3</sup> See Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs Among Ancient Egyptians*.

"I will sing unto the Lord, for He is highly exalted,  
The horse and the rider hath He thrown into the sea  
The Lord is my strength and my song,  
And He is become my salvation." <sup>4</sup>

And as an accompaniment to this music (music, among the Hebrews, had at last become something more than a mere unadorned melody, having now acquired the dress of instrumental and rhythmical accompaniment), "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam sang unto them:

Sing ye to the Lord, for He is highly exalted,  
The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the Sea." <sup>5</sup>

That the Hebrews had been well versed in Egyptian music is a well known fact. "Moses was learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians," and music must have been an inseparable part of this "wisdom" just as it was an inseparable part of Egyptian life. The incident of the golden calf shows the influence of the Egyptian sojourn and there can be little doubt that the song they sang to the calf <sup>6</sup> was an Egyptian one, such as they heard so often during the Egyptian religious festivities. But if all this proof remains unconvincing, the indisputable fact remains that the Hebrew music of the patriarchal days was radically different from that of the post-Egyptian days. For now, the Hebrews actually had a definite musical technique. The irrefutable fact is that this technique was acquired completely from the Egyptians. The inspiration and the spirit of the music, however, have always remained Hebrew.

<sup>4</sup> Ex. xv: 1-2.

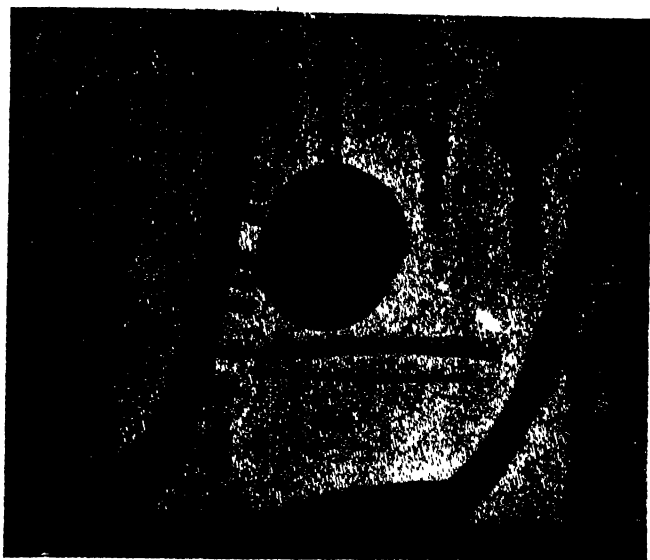
<sup>5</sup> Ex. xv: 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. xxxii: 18-19.

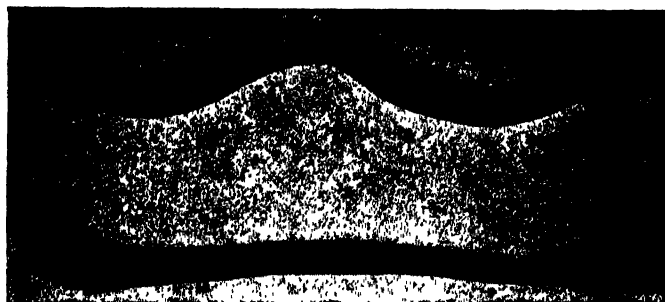
The very concept of Hebrew music changed under Egyptian influence. Before, as we have seen, music was relegated to a dim and obscure background; it was merely a satisfactory expression of emotions—that, and nothing more. Now, the stature of music grew unto tremendous size and, once for all, it became an inseparable part of Hebrew life. After their stay in Egypt, the Hebrews learned that music should be wedded to religion and to religious worship and, when the Israelites learned this, music definitely came into its own among the Hebrews. The greatness of the Lord, supplications and prayers of gratitude to Him, can be expressed only in the supple cadences of poetry couched in music; sacrifices, worship must be accompanied by the dance and by music, just as they were in Egypt. Music, by this association, soon even assumed a holy aspect, and we find that musicians are priests<sup>7</sup> and, later on, in the First Book of Samuel<sup>8</sup> and in the Second Book of Kings,<sup>9</sup> that prophets are musicians. All this, I maintain, is Egyptian influence.

And together with the change of the concept came the change of the nature and form of Hebrew music. In the patriarchal days, the music consisted of an uneven and shapeless melody, bald and unaccompanied. But when the Hebrews learned the science of music from the Egyptians, their music became infinitely more complex and, consequently, greater. From the Egyptians, the Hebrews learned to give form and shape to their melodies by moulding them into the narrow form of a scale. The Egyptian pentatonic scale, used so effectively in early Egyptian music, now became the musical tool of the Hebrews, and we find

<sup>7</sup> Numbers x: 8.<sup>8</sup> I Sam. x: 5.<sup>9</sup> II Kings iii: 15.



**SISTRUM AND OTHER ANCIENT INSTRUMENTS**



**HEBREW RITUAL TRUMPETS (SHOFARS)**



SEMITIC CAPTIVES PLAYING ON FOUR-STRINGED HARPS



EGYPTIAN PICTURE OF BEDOUIN  
WITH KINNOR



THREE STRINGED



FIVE STRINGED



SIX STRINGED  
LYRES OR KINNORS

many pages of the Bible actually couched in melodies written in just that scale. Moreover, the Hebrews learned that melody, when used alone, is, itself, but a primitive form of music, and so they now began to apply the elements of harmony and rhythm. Their songs had always the background of tabrets or timbrels as a rhythmic accompaniment now, which, they discovered, added a new glow of life and spirit to the music. Instruments were no longer played separately but in pairs or in choirs so that their different tones played simultaneously created the very first steps of harmony. Slowly, music was growing, and by acquiring melodic, rhythmic and harmonic form it was becoming a developed art.

And from the Egyptians, the Hebrews borrowed many of their instruments. The harp and the pipe, of which Jubal was the father; the tabret—a small drum—later used to accompany the music of the pipe and mentioned in connection with Laban and Jacob; the *shofar*, which is mentioned so frequently, in the later pages of the Bible and which is so prominent a feature of our modern synagogal procedure during the High Holy Days—these are the only instruments which are native to the Hebrews. The other instruments were patterned after those of the Egyptians. In later portions of the Bible, frequent mention is made of the *toph*. The *toph* is a small drum held in the palm of the hand upon which the musician would beat the rhythmic accompaniment to a dance or a song with his fingers. At all Hebrew festivals and at all religious celebrations the *toph* was prominently used. Deborah, it will be remembered, used it to accompany herself in her song of thanks

to the Lord.<sup>10</sup> This *toph*, after all, is merely a reproduction of the Egyptian hand-drum. The timbrel, used by Miriam to accompany Moses' song of praise, is derived from the various species of Egyptian tambourines. The *kinoir*, which acquired considerable importance in the music of the Hebrews during the period of King David and certainly one of the most beloved of all Hebrew instruments, dates from the Egyptian lyre. From this lyre, also, can be traced the various forms of Hebrew hand-harps—the *nifer* and the cithara, the former resembling the modern guitar while the latter is similar to the old-time lute. Finally, the Hebrews acquired from the Egyptian the various forms of flutes and horns in all their different sizes and shapes, so that when the Hebrews left Egypt they took with them more than the gold treasures of the Egyptians mentioned in the Bible. They had also taken its music and its fully developed orchestra of instruments.

The Hebrews, therefore, learned from the Egyptians the form of melody, the use of rhythm and the elements of harmony. They acquired from it a complete band of instruments to voice their musical messages. Technique had, at last, been mastered. Form, it is true, is ever a slave to idea. And although the form of Hebrew music is that of another nation, the idea has always been its own. It had merely borrowed the form from the Egyptians; the message was its own. Now the Hebrews had the means with which to express the voice of their sensitive hearts and their soaring inspiration, a voice which has persisted through centuries, and has lived for more than four thousand years.

<sup>10</sup> Judges v.

### III

## THE MUSIC OF THE TEMPLE

**A** TECHNIQUE had been acquired in Egypt; Israel had the mould in which to infuse its lyrical inspiration. Now we can expect the first seeds of Hebrew music.

For a long time these seeds of Hebrew music lay dormant; for a long time they were deeply embedded in the soil of the Hebrew race, taking firm root. But when, at last, the seed did sprout forth, it revealed itself as a bewildering blossom.

It was under the reign of King David that Hebrew music flowered fully. David, as a youth, it will be remembered, played the harp with a magical touch, and his outburst of melodies could soothe the perturbed spirit of Saul. Music was an important influence throughout his whole life. It is, then, not to be wondered at that when he became king, he should have raised music to such an unprecedented significance. Under King David, music became an inseparable part of every activity of the Hebrews; once for all, music and religion became one.

We find, for example, that the singers among the Levites were free from other service, "for they were employed night and day"<sup>1</sup>—certainly showing that music had become widely used among the Hebrews. We find, also, that music

<sup>1</sup> I Chron. ix: 33.



was employed for all significant religious events. When battling with the Philistines, David, who had the ark of the Lord carried from Baalejude, accompanied the solemn march with music. "And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord with all manner of instruments made of cypress wood and with harps, and with psalteries and with timbrels, and with sistra and cymbals."<sup>2</sup> And then, when David transported the ark of the Lord from Kiriath-jearim, "David and all Israel played before God with all their might; even with songs and with harps, and with psalteries and with timbrels, and with cymbals and with trumpets."<sup>3</sup> Music, consequently, had now settled into the very bone and marrow of the Hebrew religion.

At every opportunity King David increased the importance of music. In the First Book of Chronicles we find him appointing certain Levites to administer to the ark, and also certain Levites to administer to the music.<sup>4</sup> And with that task completed, he raised a glorious song of praise and exultation to God, a song that had music lurking in each of its phrases and in every one of its cadences:

"O give thanks unto the Lord, call upon His name;  
Make known His doings among the peoples.  
Sing unto Him, sing praises unto Him;  
Speak ye of all His marvelous works."<sup>5</sup>

And when David reached a ripe old age, and when he appointed his son Solomon king over Israel, he gathered to him all the priests of Israel, and we learn the bewilder-

<sup>2</sup> II Sam. vi: 5.

<sup>3</sup> I Chron. xiii: 8.

<sup>4</sup> I Chron. xvi: 4.

<sup>5</sup> I Chron. xvi: 8-10.

ing fact that among all these priests there were "four thousand who praised the Lord 'with the instruments which I made to praise therewith.'" Four thousand professional musicians! King David had, indeed, left a fertile musical heritage unto Israel.

But the greatest musical heritage of all which King David left us were his Psalms—some of the most genuinely beautiful things in ancient music. This music has pathos, it has sincerity, it has religious ecstacy—and all expressed with remarkable felicity. The music, alas! is gone; but the words have remained with us; the words—and a knowledge of how they were conducted musically. And these are sufficient to show us that these Psalms are, indeed, among the gems that we find in the repertoire of Hebrew music.

Most of the Psalms in the days of David were sung antiphonally—that is, one choir sang one stanza and received as an answer the second stanza sung by the congregation—precisely as they are sung today. But for a few of the more festive Psalms this method was abandoned, and instead a small choir sang the main theme, and the refrain was sung by the congregation. As an accompaniment, a whole orchestra of instruments performed, with the cantor as leader. The orchestra was highly developed, and it contained a bewildering variety of musical instruments: the lute, the harp, cymbal, psaltery, organ, flute, cithara, cornet, sacbut, dulcimer, sistrum, bells and trumpets.<sup>6</sup> I might also add certain wooden instruments which

<sup>6</sup> According to Rabbi Hanane, in his *Schilti Haggiborim*, as many as thirty-six different instruments were used for the Psalms. But this is controversial, there being no mention of instruments other than enumerated above.

faintly foreshadowed the birth of the violin.<sup>7</sup> All this, I think, convincingly proves that the Psalms required highly organized music; that, in fact, music was almost as important as the words themselves.

Nor was the development of music to be retarded with the death of David. In Solomon, music had found a new, great champion. Solomon, following in the footsteps of his father, devoted considerable energy towards musical activities. The four thousand musical Levites swelled in number; Solomon himself composed new music, and music became more and more affiliated with religious services. The inaugural ceremonies of the Holy Temple consisted primarily of music. For the Levites, "with cymbals and psalteries and harps stood at the east end of the altar and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding trumpets. And it came to pass that the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and that they lifted their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music and praised the Lord. . . ."<sup>8</sup> And then, the Temple inaugurated, music became the queen of our religion. The Temple boasted of a private orchestra to perform the accompaniments; choirs to sing the refrains. Song, moreover, was highly organized. There were hundreds of trained men and women singers arranged in two choirs, who had their special assigned places upon the steps of the Temple Court. Below and above them were the orchestra, and before the entire group of musicians stood the cantor,

<sup>7</sup> In Samuel we find that there existed all manner "of instruments made of cypress wood."

<sup>8</sup> II Chron. v: 12-13.

leading the musical forces like a modern orchestral conductor. With such importance accorded to music, it was inevitable for a burst of creative industry to appear, and a considerable library of excellent Hebrew music was composed at this time. Many of our most beloved tunes which we sing today to our holiday prayers first originated and were first sung within the walls of the Holy Temple.

During Solomon's reign came to light the greatest Hebrew song of all and, probably, the greatest song of the world. Solomon's Song of Songs is truly a song of songs! Listen to the mere cadences of the opening lines and you will hear a music as rich, as ecstatic, as full of passion and power as any symphony:

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—  
For thy love is better than wine.  
Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance;  
Thy name is as ointment poured forth;  
Therefore do the maidens love thee.”

Surely there is nothing in ancient music to equal this for sheer beauty, for sheer intensity of emotion, for sheer lyrical eruption, for sheer ecstasy. It is all on an exalted plane of beauty, a beauty which both intoxicates and wearies the listener. If ancient Hebrew music had produced nothing but the Song of Songs, it would have still been an exalted plane. Once for all, in this panegyric to love, Solomon had spoken “in the language of the gods”; and the language of the gods is always sublime music. This music, certainly, had no equal in ancient times, for it has hardly an equal today. In contrast to it, the music of Egypt and Greece stands awkward and naked, without

science or art, without feeling or beauty, without rhyme or reason. Israel had used the lessons learned in Egypt to good advantage, indeed! It was creating imperishable music.

What were the general characteristics of the music of the Temple of which the Song of Songs is the highest and most perfect example? It was a highly pliant music, with little form and considerable freedom. Today we use primarily two modes in our musical composition; in the Temple nine modes were employed, each with its own psychological mission and each employed in order to produce a definite emotion or to attain a definite effect. From the Egyptians, the Hebrews had learned the pentatonic scale, and they used the scale frequently. They also used the octave scale, for some of the Psalms are "to be sung with eight strings"<sup>9</sup> and the tetrachord.<sup>10</sup> These formed the backbone of the music. There were, furthermore, three types of music: the recitative,<sup>11</sup> in which the prayer was recited in a dull monotone; there was the song, with its definitely shaped melodic line; there was the embellishment, which was sung freely by the cantor, not to any set forms or rules, but at his whim and usually extemporaneously. Harmony was yet in its infancy, the only type of harmonic singing in existence being octave singing and antiphony. Rhythm was highly marked and developed, and most of the instruments in the orchestra of the Temple were rhythmic rather than melodic instruments, able to

<sup>9</sup> Psalms vi and viii.

<sup>10</sup> According to Naumann's *History of Music* vol. I, page 73. Usually omitted by other commentators on Hebrew music.

<sup>11</sup> This, probably, is the forerunner of the *secco recitativo* of the Italian opera.

sharply accentuate beats and measures. The melody was distinguished by an especial preference for the "augmented-second interval," a characteristic which still persists in modern Hebrew music.

All in all, it can be seen that the music of the Temple was highly developed. It was, I believe, the most highly developed music of the ancient world.

## IV

### SYNAGOGUE MUSIC GROWS OLDER

**T**HEN there came bitter years of exile, and for a long while Hebrew music languished. For art can develop only when there is peace and tranquillity in the body and the mind of a race. And how can there be peace and tranquillity among a captive race? "By the waters of Babylon" are the poignant words of a Psalm, "we sat down when we remembered Zion. As for our harps, we hung them upon the trees that are therein."<sup>1</sup> And then, when conquering Babylon, aware of the overwhelming musical superiority of the captives, eagerly asked: "Sing us a song of Zion!" the pathetic answer was "Oh, how shall we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?"

But Hebrew music, fortunately, did not die in this strange land. Although lips and voices were silent with grief, Hebrew music was preserved in the hearts of the captives, and there was it nourished and kept alive during all the gruesome years of captivity. Then when, at last, the captivity had ended and Israel jubilantly returned to its hearth, we find that among those who returned were "the singers: the children of Asaph, a hundred and forty-eight."<sup>2</sup> The children of Asaph, it was, who had brought back to Zion the music of the Temple, and brought it back intact. Nothing had been lost, and now, in the peace of Zion, it could continue on its march of development.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 137.

<sup>2</sup> Neh. vii: 44.

Once again in Zion, Hebrew music flourished. "At the dedication of the Wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all the places to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgiving and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries and with harps."<sup>3</sup> Finally, when the Second Temple was planned and erected—the second mighty tribute of the Hebrew race to its God—it was, of course, dedicated with music. "And when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals to praise the Lord, according to the directions of King David, king of Israel. And they sang one to another in praising the giving thanks to the Lord: 'For He is good, for His mercy endureth forever towards Israel.'"<sup>4</sup>

Services were once again held regularly now, and to music. There were prayers and hymns and psalms; music was now acquiring a greater and greater importance among the Hebrews. In the Talmud we find stated that in the daily services "there were two silver trumpets which gave first a sound of blowing, then of trembling and again one of blowing."<sup>5</sup> After this, Ben Asra—a high official of the Temple—would strike a cymbal and then the Levites would unanimously join their voices in a culminating song of praise to God. The Talmud further mentions that two flutes played regularly in the Temple, every single day, and at the close of a cadence in a song, a flute, playing as solo, would improvise a hauntingly beautiful melody as a

<sup>3</sup> Neh. xii: 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra iii: 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Tamid vii.



closing.<sup>6</sup> Thus we see that instrumental music was already becoming a significant factor in the Temple.

But the really inspired music of the time was reserved for the holidays. For example, during the Feast of Tabernacles, there was a festivity known as the "Drawing of the Water Festival," taking place the second evening of the holiday. At this ceremony, the Levites stood on the fifteen steps with their musical instruments in hand and singing, from Psalms and prayers, their most melodic and their most beautiful songs.<sup>7</sup> Other holidays inspired the Levites to compose other music corresponding to the spirit of the day. There were songs of sadness and pain for the sadder holidays; for the more joyous ones there were ecstatic songs of joy. It was during this period—the period of the Second Temple—that Levites employed that technique used and learned during the days of King David and King Solomon to the best advantage in creating a mountain of new Hebrew music. A great amount of our modern synagogal music was composed at this time by the Levites.

But there was not only an increase in the repertoire of Hebrew music during the Second Temple but there was likewise a constant and incessant development in the technique of composition. The Levites were becoming more and more adept in handling their forms and in composing religious music. I have already written that the music of the First Temple consisted of the recitative, the song and the embellishment. During the Second Temple these forms of musical composition were tremendously developed; they acquired spontaneity, freshness and, above all, artistry. The cantor was chosen from among the leading

<sup>6</sup> Ar. xi: 3.

<sup>7</sup> Suk. v.

musicians of the race and it was required that he be as skillful in creating spontaneous music as in singing it. Moreover, now it was that the reading of the Law was introduced and with it a new type of music—the music of the Bible. It was a fresh mine for the inspiration of the musical Levites and they absorbed this inspiration, and gave forth such a monumental library of Biblical music that, once for all, the entire Bible was set to music—a music which is still sung whenever portions of the Law are read.

It was also at this time that the Hebrews learned the first germs of notation. It must be remembered that there was little need for a definite musical notation among ancient Hebrews. Every good Hebrew attended the Holy Temple regularly; he heard the Psalms and the prayers sung hundreds of times so that they became indelibly impressed upon his memory. He sang it at home to his children, who were accustomed to hear this music from birth. This music travelled from ear to ear, from lip to lip through generation after generation. What need then was there to set it down on paper if a whole race knew all this music by heart? Of course, as invariably happens with folk-music, there were, from time to time, certain minute changes in the melodic line, and that is the reason why we have several versions of the same song. But the melody, at large, is intrinsically the same. There was, therefore, not such a really vital need for notation; all that was needed was some sort of sign to remind the cantor what tune or what inflection he should use for a certain word or phrase. And that is all that ancient notation was meant to be: a reminder for the reader of what he was to sing; a sort of musical shorthand.

The earliest notation in Hebrew music—dated from the Second Temple—was for the sounds of the *shofar*. The first sound of the *shofar*, according to the ritual, was to be a loud blast; the second, abrupt and interrupted calls; the third another loud, sustained blast. And for this music, the following notation was adopted:

*Tikiah* (the loud sustained blast)

*Truah* (a quivering reproduction of *tikiah*)

*Shivorim* (abrupt and interrupted calls)

*Tikiah* (a repetition of the first loud, sustained blast)

This proved to be a valuable help to the memory and so, before long, the cantors began to wonder if they could not utilize the same sort of shorthand for their Psalms and prayers and their Readings from the Law. The progress in this field was slow but the results were seen after much labor. The result was the notation of the Bible. The Levites evolved thirty different inflections which they felt they used most often for their Biblical readings. For these different inflections they evolved and invented curious signs to label them, giving each a distinct name. And so they would place these little signs above or below a word and would know with sufficient accuracy for their purpose, exactly what inflection to apply to each syllable. This was not an infallible system of musical notation, but it did help the readers to remember how they were to sing a certain passage. And the reason why notation did not develop far beyond this stage was simply because it served its purpose so admirably. It still does. And every *Bar-Mitzvah* boy who learns the inflection of those thirty signs can, with

a little practise, learn to sing passages from the Bible with considerable ease.

It is interesting to observe that this notation was so practical that it was copied by the old Latin Church. There is little doubt that our Hebrew notation is precisely the same as that of the "neumes"—the notation of the old Latin Church. Even where the signs are not precisely the same, one can recognize that it was evolved in some fashion or other from our notation. And take the word itself—the word "neumes." What is its derivation? In the Temple the cantor was instructed to sing pleasantly, and the Hebrew word for pleasant is "neumah." There is even instruction at the head of some of our Psalms which states that they are to be sung with "neumah." Is the similarity between the words merely accidental? But if the reader is still skeptical there is a final and persuasive proof. Dr. Arthur Friedlander, in one of his numerous researches into this early Hebrew music, has notated, into modern musical signs, a portion of the Prophets and the plain-song *Agnus Dei* which, he thought, resembled each other. And on inspecting the written music he saw that they corresponded almost note for note. Such proof is not debatable; it is conclusive.

## IN THE AGE OF THE "PAYYATIM"

THERE is a certain period in the history of Hebrew music which is known as "the age of the *payyatim*."<sup>1</sup> The *payyatim* were religious bards, some of whom were truly gifted musicians, and who devoted their every effort to develop and to increase the repertoire of synagogal music. The definite date of the "age of *payyatim*" is unknown. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* tells us that it extends up to the seventh century, but Saadia Gaon (10th century) and Jehudah Halevi (b. 1085) were celebrated *payyatim*, so that this date is not altogether accurate. Roughly speaking, this era in Hebrew music extends from the fifth to the twelfth century—excluding ephemeral intermissions—and its influence has penetrated even beyond this age. Samuel Archivolti, a celebrated writer of the sixteenth century, tells us through his writings that some of the influences of the *payyatim* were still prevalent in his day. The *payyatim*, therefore, influenced Hebrew music for a period infinitely longer than most historians infer.

Contemporaneous with the age of the *payyatim* in the history of the world's music, was the age of the minnesingers in Germany and the age of the *trouvères* in France. It may be wise, first, to see what their influence upon music was before we attempt to study the work of the

<sup>1</sup> The derivation of the word *payyatim* is from the Greek word *payyat*—meaning "poetry."

*paiyyat*. The minnesinger and the *trouvère* "began a secular art-music which, based upon the dance and the strophic song, was ennobled by contact with the more serious music of the Church, while it in turn imbued the latter with a new sentence for words, for rhythms, for ideas. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

In short, the minnesinger and the *trouvère* brought to the church music the rhythmic and melodic charm of secular music and brought to secular music the dignity and majesty of church music, thereby enriching both musics. Sometimes church songs were brought into contact with secular subjects; often secular tunes were converted into hymns without a single change. Technically and melodically the two different types of music became inextricably wedded.

This is precisely what the *paiyyatim* did for Hebrew music. Hebrew music had until now been buried within the four walls of the Synagogue, immune to any exotic influence. Development, under such circumstances, was practically impossible. And Hebrew music during the many hundreds of years between the Second Temple and the first of the *paiyyatim* had stood still. It would have stood still permanently if it were not for the fact that the *paiyyatim* realized that Hebrew music was suffering because of its persistent seclusion. There was only one hope: contact with the more developed forms and techniques of secular music. In spirit, Hebrew music could remain the same; but technically it must advance. Otherwise, the *paiyyatim* feared, obsolescence would be its fate.

Nor were the *paiyyatim* interested in the fate of Hebrew music alone; they were also interested in the welfare of

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bekker, *The Story of Music*, p. 61.

the religion and the glamour of our religious services. They knew that our services become much more attractive with music; a festival is hardly festive unless there is plenty of music. At that time, many of the more famous and more poignant prayers were still recited in dull and uneven monotones. Surely such prayers would become ten times more attractive and ten times more effective if couched in full-swinging melodies. So argued the *paiyyat*. He felt that our religion would be more beautiful, that services on the Sabbath—and especially on the important holidays—would be much more eloquent, with good music. Until now there were only a few prayers with music; the aim of the *paiyyat* was to convert every prayer into a song. They felt that their lifework would not be completed until every prayer in the *Siddur* would have become adapted to some psychologically related music.

And so a veritable mountain of music was brought into the four walls of the Synagogue. The *paiyyatim* borrowed from folk-music, from church music, from folk-dances, from everything that was musical, and brought this music to the Hebrew words of Hebrew prayers. Almost overnight, our prayers acquired music, and old music acquired the garb of unfamiliar words. Let us glance at some of these transformations. *Achad Mi Yodea*, sung on every Seder night, is an imitation of a Catholic vesper, dating from the middle of the fifteenth century and the Church melody itself was modeled after a monkish drinking song. *Had Gadya*, sung immediately after the *Achad Mi Yodea* on Passover nights, is a Provençal folk-song sung during the Middle Ages. And so with other famous Hebrew prayers. *Mo-os-Tsur*, sung over the candlelights of Chanu-

kah, was copied from a Lutheran chorale, *Nun freut euch, ihr lieben Christen*, which in turn was adapted from a German street-song; *El Norah Alila*, sung on Yom Kippur, was patterned after another Lutheran chorale, *Eine Feste Burg; Mizmoir Shir*, of Sephardic tradition, was copied from *L'Homme Armé*; *Shir Ha'ma'alot*, sung by German Jews, is a version of an air widely sung in mediæval Italy; a Polish folk-song, *Mezme, ja kontusz mezme*, lent its melody to our nineteenth Psalm; a famous folk-song of central Germany became *En Kelohainu*. These illustrations, of course, drawn from a highly copious and prolific list, are merely epitomes. There were thousands and thousands of songs borrowed from secular music and converted into Hebrew music by the indefatigable work of these zealous *payyatim*.

It is, of course, foolish to assume that all our Hebrew prayers were copied from such secular music or that the *payyatim* could do nothing but copy the music of others, as is quite a prevalent belief. The *payyatim* were, in general, really excellent musicians. If they copied the music of others it was only because so monumental was the work they had set for themselves that it was humanly impossible for them to accomplish it without employing some extraneous assistance. Many of the prayers, however, are really of Hebrew origin, musically. For the *payyatim* did also their goodly share of creative composition. We know very definitely that many of our more celebrated prayers come from the original pens of the more famous *payyatim*. Let us glance at some examples: *Atah Hoo Alohaihu* is the work of Meshullam ben Kalonymos, who also composed *Ain Komocha*; *Z'chor Bris* was composed by Bershom



bar Judah (b. 960); *Adon Olom*, famous Sabbath hymn, was created by Solomon ibn Gabirol (11th century); *Shir Haḳovod* by Eleazar Kalir (8th or 10th century); *Selichah*, the oldest penitential prayer, is most definitely the original work of some *payyat* whose name is unknown; *Yigdal* was composed by Daniel ben Judah (13th century); *Aḳdmous* by Meir ben Isaac of Orleans (11th century).

My illustrations could keep on indefinitely, for the list of original musical compositions is almost as prolific and as copious as the list of borrowed music. Musically, however, it is not only the equal of the borrowed music but in many cases infinitely superior. One finds in these original compositions a closer union, a tastier harmony, between the words and the music, whereas in the borrowed music there are many absurd irrelevancies. The heart-rending prayer *Shem Norah*, for example, was adapted from *Senora*, a light and airy love-tune sung in Spain. Pleasant and saccharine *Bella Amaryllis* and *Tres Colores in Una* were used for majestic and devout religious outcries. And the sombre, almost grim, *Hodu L'Adonai* and *La David Mizmor* are set to lovely dance tunes even though the former contains so tragic a passage as "Man is like to vanity; his days are as a shadow that passes away!" But in the original music composed by the *payyatim* one does not find any such absurdities; everything is in perfectly good taste. The sighs are unmistakable Hebrew sighs; the melodies are well sprinkled with the pathetic groans of a tired Hebrew soul; one feels, throughout, that the prayers have slipped from hearts that are pure Hebrew hearts.

Of these *payyatim*, the most celebrated and the most widely acclaimed was Rabbi Israel Najara of Safed, Pales-

tine. Rabbi Najara adapted more than six hundred and fifty prayers to secular music and composed several hundred original piquant Hebrew melodies. He had an innate talent for quaint and pathetic melodies, and some of his most celebrated prayers are those which speak of death and of sin. His work was widely appreciated in his time and he was the object of glory and veneration among his fellow-Hebrews. Among other celebrated *payyatim* there was that sweet singer of Hebrew verse, Judah Halevi, the foremost Hebrew poet of all time. Then there were Gershom bar Judah and Meshullam ben Kalonymos and Eleazar Kalir—all of whose work still persists within the walls of the Synagogue to endear Hebrew prayers to the hearts of pious Jews.

One cannot overestimate the fruits which were reaped by the zealous and untiring musical efforts of the *payyatim*. They arrived upon the scene of Hebrew music at a strategic moment and did not leave it until their work had been fully completed. But for them Hebrew music would have long since slipped into obsolescence and neglect; would have become spiritually and technically old and decrepit. But for them the history of Hebrew music would have ended with the Second Temple. As it is, Hebrew music was refreshed with its contact with the outer world; the layers of dust which had been settled upon it were blown off. As it is, the repertoire of Hebrew music has grown voluminously, and some of our most poignant prayers, including the *Kol Nidrei*, date from this glamorous and fruitful era. Finally, the *payyatim* made it possible to add a glow and color to synagogal worship. What was dull and desiccated

before their time now began to quiver with beauty and life, due to their influence and labor.

The age of the *payyatim* had brought the history of synagogal music to a close. Except for a few superficial changes—which we shall discuss later—synagogal music today is practically the same as it was in the golden days of the *payyatim*. This is at once a comment on the greatness of this period, and a bitter criticism of the periods in Hebrew music which followed. It is now almost eight hundred years since the last of the *payyatim*; for eight hundred years Hebrew music has slumbered. Hebrew music needs technical development painfully—the overwhelmingly remarkable technique of secular music—but it has remained cloistered within the walls of the synagogue, refusing to see the light of day. Our age cries for more *payyatim* to do for us what the *payyat* of old did for Hebrew music eight hundred years ago. We need them as urgently as they were needed then—more urgently in fact, for it is only in the last eight hundred years that music has become a really remarkable art. With the spirit of Hebrew music blended with the technique of secular music we could get immortal utterances. That would be the task for the modern *payyatim*. But where can we find them?

## VI

### THE YEARS OF EXILE

THE Hebrew race had been scattered far and wide; it wandered, like a pale ghost, to all the corners of the world seeking peace and rest and a place where it might undisturbedly pursue its religion, and wherever it went it carried with it in its heart its traditions, its religion and its music. And no sooner did these wandering Jews lower their packs from their shoulders and begin to settle, even before they built their roofs over their heads, they immediately set to work upon a house for worship. The synagogue, as we all know, has been the binding force to tie all these separate elements of the Hebrew race into one inextricable and imperishable whole. And the synagogue has been the force which has kept Hebrew music alive and glowing during these tempestuous years. Within the four walls of the Synagogue did Hebrew music lay hidden during the past fifteen hundred years, far removed from the light of day. Especially after the age of the *payyat* was the synagogue to be the tomb for Hebrew music. There it buried itself as though afraid that any outside influence would be poisonous to its existence. That is the reason why that peculiar charm, that haunting and poignant spirit which we know to be the Jewish spirit, that unique expression of something that is deeply embedded in the Jewish heart and in the Jewish soul, still lingers tenaciously to our synagogal music.

It is now eight hundred years since the last of the *pay-yatim* put his feather on parchment to enrich the store of Hebrew music, and during these many years the change through which Hebrew music has gone is almost negligible. It is true that something of the spirit of the various nations has colored Hebrew music—in Germany, Hebrew music acquired a peculiar Teutonic, and in France, a certain French flavor—but so strong is the Hebrew element in Hebrew music that these foreign colorings are not very marked and certainly unimportant. This, then, was no vital change. In the sixteenth century, however, Salamone Rossi, a very talented contrapuntalist who is a significant figure in the history of the world's music, attempted to add harmony to the synagogal music, attempted to introduce four-part choral singing into the synagogue, but so busy was it evading the wrath and hatred of anti-Semites that it could hardly trouble itself with extensive musical reforms. Salamone Rossi, unfortunately, had come too soon.

These were the two external influences which attempted to change Hebrew music—the spirit of the nation in which the Jew was residing and Salamone Rossi's contrapuntal works—but with little success. There remains now to speak of one internal influence, an influence which had an effect upon the nature and the spirit of Hebrew music, an influence which affected Hebrew music so strongly that it still persists.

I mean, of course, the Chassidic movement. I need not, at this late date, review the nature of this movement. It is known far too well. Every Jew knows the strange atmosphere with which the age is permeated, its deep brooding mysticism, its sombre color; every Jew

knows how the Chassid regarded the rabbi as God's prophet who was constantly in communion with Him and how the rabbis could do wonders and miracles because of the strange powers with which God had endowed them. This movement brought the really pious Jew into a much closer and more mysterious communion with the outer world; and at the very end, it made him passionately, then insanely, eager to catch a glimpse of the mystery of life, to probe its impenetrable darkness and, at last, to find the light. In short, by solving the mystery of life and the universe, and by communion with the powers of darkness, to be able to control the forces of destiny.

Such a spirit, which settled deeply into the very heart of Jewish life, quite naturally brought with it a new type of Hebrew music—a Hebrew music with a new atmosphere, a new spirit and a new and colossal force. A whole library of Chassidic music has come down to us—a music, technically the same as the Hebrew music that preceded it but with a far different message. For the first time we hear not only the pathetic sighs of lament in Hebrew music but frenzy, savagery and an almost barbaric vigor, too. The hectic festivities of a Saturday night or a *Simchas Torah* at the rabbi's home has come down to us in the passionate sweep of rhythm that constitutes the Chassid dances. Joy, in Chassidic music, becomes intoxicated frenzy. And even the sorrow is peculiar and unique. It is veiled in a tenuous mist, painted in sombre black, expressing a brooding and mysterious meditation. It is almost as though the very heart of the Chassidic movement had given itself to the music and was now using its heart-beats for its rhythm.

The Chassidic movement also brought with it a veritable mountain of satirical folk-music—sharp, pointed, satirical stabs at the omnipotence of the rabbi and at the blundering attempts of his disciples to learn the unknowable. But before we can speak of this music we must first turn our attention to Hebrew folk-music in general.

If you want to catch a glimpse of the heart of a race you must listen to the strains of its folk-music. Folk-music grows out of a race as naturally as fruit grows out of soil. It is the impulse for people to sing when they are happy, and to sing when they are sad, and this singing, as it passes along from lip to lip, now growing, now changing, now improving, speaks more things about the character and the nature of a race than any history could. Folk-music is the music composed by a whole race and for itself; it is music which comes out of a past, as mysteriously as a race comes, but which, having come, persists forever. It is music which is indigenous, whose soil is the heart of a race and whose seeds are pain and pleasure. If we would have music without artifice, without trimmings, without appendages—music which is eloquent because of its nudity and simplicity—we must turn to the simple and heartfelt strains of folk-music.

The very earliest of Hebrew folk-music—and the distinction between the folk-song and the synagogue chant in ancient days is that the former is purely secular music composed to secular themes while the latter is religious music composed for prayers alone—gracefully divides itself into four categories to express the four most significant events in a human life: the wedding, the work spent over the

harvest, victory in battle and, finally, death. The first of these—the song for the wedding—are musical celebrations for bride and groom which, unfortunately, have not penetrated from the ancient day into our own. The second—the songs over the harvest—have abundant examples in the Bible. “Let me sing of my beloved”—runs one of the more famous of these folk-songs—“a song of my beloved touching his vineyard”—and there ensues an elaborate and glowing eulogy, not to the beloved as one might be led to suspect, but rather to his vineyard.<sup>1</sup> For victory we have songs from the time Moses celebrated his triumph over the Egyptians,<sup>2</sup> through such monumental pæans of praise as Deborah’s song,<sup>3</sup> to that greatest of all victorious chants, the song of David to his God in humble and devout gratitude for having been delivered safely from the hands of Saul:

“The Lord is My Rock, in Him I take refuge,  
My Shield and my horn of salvation, my high  
tower and my refuge,  
My Saviour, Thou savest me from violence.  
Praised, I cry, is the Lord,  
And I am saved from my enemies.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, we have the dirge, of which there are so very many examples in the Bible and all of them of such poignant eloquence that it is well nigh impossible to choose the best.<sup>5</sup>

But it seems as if all the musical energies of the ancient

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah v.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus xv.

<sup>3</sup> Judges xv.

<sup>4</sup> II Sam. 22.

<sup>5</sup> For the reader who wishes a specimen of the ancient dirge we would recommend David’s poignant lamentations over Saul and Jonathan in the Second Book of Samuel.



Hebrew were expended on synagogue music rather than on folk-songs, and it was not until the years of exile that we find a veritable outburst of folk-music among the Hebrews, when the stagnancy of Hebrew music resulted, as though in compensation, in an efflorescence of folk-music. During the years of exile, the Hebrews learned to express their pleasure and, more especially, their pain and their sorrows and their yearnings in songs of their own creation, and to console themselves by crooning these songs to their children which, in turn, these children crooned to their offspring. During these years do we find the birth of the infinite variety of songs—songs of love and weary pain, songs of joy and songs of sorrow. We find the birth of such fragile and tender things as *Yah-lal*, as *Poh Baaretz*, as *Ha-mavdil*. In such songs do we find the heart of Israel. These are simple tunes. The melodic line is ordinary and does not boast of original turns or twists; the harmonic accompaniment is poverty-stricken. But despite—I am almost tempted to say, because—of this simplicity, one can clearly see the spirit of a race. In these songs one can feel the spirit that has ennobled a people; a spirit which is ever proud and with head raised high; a spirit which, even two thousand years of exile, two thousand years of persecution and pain could not subdue; a spirit which is perpetually aglow and which neither time nor tide could extinguish.

But what is more noteworthy about this period of folk-music—and permit me to add at once that the period extends through the fifteen hundred years of exile up to our very day—is that it has produced much comic and wistfully humorous music, well sprinkled with raucous witti-

cisms and with a carefree abandon. There is an admirable whimsicality to such efforts as *Yoss'l Mit Dem Fiddl*, as *Heint*—with its exuberant advice to take the cash and let the credit go—as *Yoschke Fort Avek*, whimsicality which hardly betrays the fact that such facetious bits have come from a race that is terribly sad. Listen to those heartfelt gay melodies and you will probably be swept away by its lightness. This, I am convinced, has been a monumental contribution to Hebrew music, for music has been freed from its sombre and heavy gloom of tragedy and has been infused with a lighter spirit and with a more diverse splash of colors. Hebrew music, in short, has widened its scope and its field tremendously.

The Chassidic movement brought with it a new type of folk-song—a type new for Hebrew music—the satirical bit. There is so much honest mischief and good humor in these satirical stabs that, despite the fact that the Chassidic movement is long over, these songs still linger with us and evoke as much good humored mirth today as they did in years past. Who, for example, does not know that delicious morsel about the rabbi who could do wonders including going into a body of water completely dry and coming out thoroughly wet? Or any number of such delicious and good humored and good natured exclamations?

Of course, all this folk-music is essentially simple—simply written and without any unnecessary details. The melody is often bald and naked and the harmony negligible. But therein lies its great strength. For in its simplicity and lack of superfluous dress these melodies are really the poignant expressions of our race. Wherein are these songs Hebrew music? Is it because of certain technicalities and

habits, such as a preponderance of sadness in the melody, the unique habit of utilizing the augmented-second interval, the monotonous rhythms? This, most assuredly, is not the answer. This is Hebrew music rather because there is an indefinable something in these songs—something which cannot be explained by harmonic laws or musical statutes but which exists nevertheless. It is in emotion that these songs are Hebrew—an unadorned primitive emotion that one can discover only in folk-music. And because of its unadorned emotion these songs come from the very heart of Israel—and come directly.

## VII

### MODERN TENDENCIES IN HEBREW MUSIC—THE YOUNGER RUSSIANS

**H**EBREW music has recently come to life again. It has poked its head from out of the Synagogue, where for several thousand years it has been buried, and has discovered the light—and found that the light is good. And in this light it is rapidly growing vigorous and healthy. After thousands of years of existence, Hebrew music is now first reaching full maturity. Composers throughout the entire world are beginning to find out that there is a voice latent in Hebrew music, a voice which when translated into the modern musical language could produce sublime music. Composers, therefore, who until now have been far removed from matters Jewish, have meekly returned to the fold again; songs, hymns, chants long dead, are being brought back to life—literally from out of the grave; an interest in Hebrew music has become so contagious, even among musical amateurs, that in many important centers there are already societies whose mission it is to devote themselves exclusively to the study of Hebrew music.

This, certainly, is a healthy condition for Hebrew music. But, it might well be asked, what has suddenly inspired this almost universal interest in a music several thousand years old?

Throughout the musical world during the past fifty years there has been a marked tendency among composers to resort to native national music as an idiom in composing their music; those who did not use a definite national idiom attempted to glorify their country in their music in one way or another. I need but mention the work of the Russian five, the Hungarian music of Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly, the Italian music of Casella and Respighi, the Spanish music of Albeniz, Arbos and De Falla, Sibelius's "Finlandia" and Ernest Bloch's "America" in order to show that this nationalistic tendency in modern music is widespread. How successful this movement has been in the creation of great music is already discernible. For, of all modern musical works which are listened to with interest and admiration by music audiences, nationalistic music invariably heads the list.

Quite naturally, this universal patriotism on the part of composers became converted, in the case of the Jew, into a glowing, almost frenzied, race-consciousness. Seeing how other composers were utilizing native idioms with marvelous effectiveness, the Jewish composer began to dabble with his own native idiom, the Hebrew idiom. Headed by several gifted pioneers, practically every Jewish composer before long turned his inspiration into Hebrew channels. The result was this new renaissance of Hebrew music.

What, precisely, do we mean by Hebrew music? There are those who insist that music is music; Ernest Newman, the renowned music critic, insists that there is no other classification in music than "good music" and "bad music." Yet it becomes apparent to all those who have heard

Hebrew music that there is something here, a voice far different from that to be found in any other music. To attempt to explain Hebrew music by saying it contains the Jewish tonal-scale (the scale to be found in the Bible alone), or that the melody is sprinkled with "augmented-second intervals" is superficial, inaccurate and of little importance. Hebrew music does not consist of a technique. Hebrew music is a spirit expressed in music. That perpetual sadness, nurtured during two thousand years of the diaspora; that idealism which has kept a race alive despite the weight of centuries; that pride in one's traditions—these things are found in Hebrew music. Hebrew music is the audible expression of something that is in the heart of every Jew—a something which every Jew must recognize himself. Listen to this music that is authentically Jewish and something within you will tell you that it belongs to you.

It is this spirit, with which our old folk-songs, ritual hymns and prayers are saturated, that modern Jewish composers are attempting to reproduce in their musical utterances.

The first important efforts in the direction of reviving an interest in Hebrew music by directing the world's attention to the beauty of Hebrew folk-music came from Dr. Julius Engel, perhaps the greatest single influence in modern Hebrew music. Dr. Engel's father was a cantor in the town synagogue in Russia, and so Julius Engel had been brought into close contact with ritual music from early childhood. In later years as a composer and critic Engel did not forget the poignant prayers he had heard his father chant. He felt that these chants had a peculiar

spirit to them, a spirit which endowed them with unique beauty. He decided to study these songs minutely. Continued study merely augmented his interest in those pale, pathetic tunes. It was then that he began to collect Jewish folk-songs (making several trips to Palestine for this purpose), reviving for us many prayers and hymns which had for a long time been forgotten.

Under his wing, the Society for Jewish Folk Music was founded, comprising the foremost Jewish composers and musicians in Russia at the time—a society which has done more for the development, growth and rejuvenation of Hebrew music than any other group in existence. The paramount purpose of this society was the popularization of Hebrew music. But it also brought with it several lesser missions: to make many researches into ancient Hebrew music, to revive the better prayers and hymns and to clothe them with new harmonies; and, finally, to publish these songs annually in a huge volume. The other mission of this society was to compose original Hebrew music, containing the spirit inherent in the ancient prayers, but expressed in the advanced forms of modern symphonic, vocal and instrumental music. After all, argued these Russians, music has made such phenomenal progress during the past three hundred years; during these three centuries music has really acquired its plastic technique and form. Why, then, constrict Hebrew music to a technique and a form several thousand years old? And so, these young composers set about the task of interpreting their race in larger forms of music. Although their work in reviving ancient Jewish folk-music is of vast significance, still it is in their original music (in which Hebrew music,

for the first time, becomes something infinitely more than a mere song or hymn) that this society did its most notable work.

How has this society succeeded in its efforts to create a Hebrew music in forms larger than mere songs and hymns?

There is vitality and energy in the music of these younger Russian composers—and something infinitely more. A poignant voice sounds in their music, a voice which we have heard for years but which suddenly becomes firm and clear. These younger Russian composers create their Hebrew music irrespective of contemporary trends and fashions. The fierce dynamism of the earlier Stravinsky (which has so influenced composers of music everywhere) interests them but little. Debussy, the French six, jazz, are all alien trends to them. These younger Russian composers are self-sufficient; they neither lean on the present nor rob from the past. Everything they write has a peculiarly original twang to it.

Perhaps the most gifted of these younger Russian composers is Alexander Abramovitch Kreyn, whose pure and undefiled sincerity is equalled only by his beauty of melodic expression. Kreyn was born on October 20, 1883, and attended the Moscow Conservatory of Music, from which he graduated with the highest honors. At a very tender age, Kreyn became acquainted with Hebrew folk-songs. The haunting sadness, the suffering, the implicit beauty of these melodies attracted him closely. He became at once a passionate lover of Hebrew music. His primary aim was primarily to Hebrew music that he was to devote all his efforts.

His first distinguished work, "Salome: A Poem of Passion," was significant because of a certain lyrical intoxica-



tion which permeated the entire work. There was a vitality in the music, a sweep of rhythms and melodies. Here was a sensuousness that betrayed the race of the man who fashioned this music—a sensuousness and passion that were unrestrained. Into this music Kreyn poured out that turbulence of emotions of the Jew and the savage rhythms of the Russian that were in him. The result was invigorating and dynamic music; a veritable “poem of passion.”

Then he turned to Hebrew music. There were the “Jewish Sketches,” a quintet for strings and clarinet; there was the “Kaddish” for tenor, chorus and orchestra; there were the “Five Jewish Songs”; there was the incidental music to “Sabbatai Zevi.” And the same sincerity, the same passion, the same lyrical frenzy that ennobled his “Salome” became now the attributes of Kreyn’s expression of his race. The Jew and the Russian in him combined to create a savage music, almost—a music in which suffering and pain played a prominent part. In this music, Kreyn reaches his highest heaven of expression, because in this music Kreyn had definitely found himself. The Jew in him and the musician in him found a common idiom for expression, and their expression is often poignant, often beautiful and sometimes imperishable music.

In Gregory Kreyn—Alexander Abramovitsch’s brother, and senior by three years—music had found a profound composer. Gregory is in many respects inferior to his highly gifted brother. He lacks that magnificent lyricism, that poignancy of expression, that elaborate texture of sensuousness, which make of Alexander Abramovitsch’s music such intoxicating aural wine. But in one respect

Gregory's music is superior. His music is more serene, more placid, more introspective by far, than that of his brother. In Alexander Abramovitsch Kreyn's Hebrew music we have the expression of a man who feels; in Gregory Kreyn's music we have the expression of a man who thinks. But music is primarily the expression of emotions and not of ideas. And so, despite many of the inherent talents of Gregory Kreyn, his brother, Alexander Abramovitsch, will ever be considered the finer of the two.

Michael Fabronovitsch Gniessen—born in 1883 and a graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music—is often called the "Jewish Glinka," because he, too, sucked from the nipple of tradition and was nurtured by it. Nor does the resemblance between Gniessen and Glinka pause here. In both of these composers there is a lack of sensuous emotions; in both, their music is full of barbaric vitality. And the music of both is primarily pagan. Gniessen, like Gregory Kreyn, composes scholarly music in which perfection of form and exquisite delicacy in development are noticeable at every turn. The "Orchestral Tone Color from Shelley" (one of his earliest works) is almost the fruit of a Continental pen, so carefully drawn is it, so exquisitely planned, so fragile is it in tone structure.

But in the "Youth of Abraham" and in the "Maccabees"—two operas—the Russian vitality that had been slumbering in Gniessen burst forth suddenly. There is fire and madness in this music; the rhythms rush in every direction, like winds in a hurricane. But there is a shimmering background to all this chaos; a poignant voice in all this outburst. One hears in this music the strange pathos of the Hebrews. The same pathos with which Isaiah warned

his beloved race of a pending and inevitable doom, the same pathos with which Israel thinks about its long exile in unfriendly countries—that same pathos is to be found in Gniessen's operas.

Maximilian Steinberg, one of the most precocious of these younger Russian composers, who studied medicine but finally deserted that profession for the art he had loved as a child, is one of the few who did not compose Hebrew music patently, but in whose music, nevertheless, there is something of the Jew. There is something of the Jew in the way Steinberg speaks about the soul of the Russian peasant and his trials; something of the Jew in the tender, pale melodies; something of the Jew in the savage burst of rhythms. This music was obviously composed by a Jew who is race-conscious; we need but listen to a few bars to be cognizant of the fact.

These younger Russian composers are really very young—in age. While others, at their age, are merely experimenting, they are creating. Musically they have done many things of value. They have created an original idiom and a significant one, too. They have created some beautiful music. They have given us our first great Hebrew music. And their influence has spread to the four corners of the musical world. It is largely due to their influence and the success of their experiments, that today throughout the entire world Jewish musicians are working with the Hebrew idiom.

## VIII

### MODERN TENDENCIES IN HEBREW MUSIC—ET ALII

THE Russian composers paved the way upon which Jewish composers were to travel, and now Jewish composers throughout the world followed in their footsteps. Many of these Jewish composers were destined to go steps ahead of the Russians. Some of them concerned themselves primarily with synagogal music. One of the outstanding of these is Lazare Saminsky, the leader of the choir of Temple Emanu-El, New York, who, through his original compositions and his critical pen, has done much to further the cause of Hebrew music. Saminsky is a composer of considerable talent and good taste. Though his music never reaches profundity or attains great eloquence, yet everything he has composed is neatly phrased and he has achieved many moments of real beauty. His ballet, "The Lament of Rachel," his "Hebrew Suite" and the "Four Sacred Songs," to mention only a few of his outstanding works, have their roots deeply embedded in the Synagogue.

A. W. Binder, a youthful figure in this movement, is another composer whose chief concern is with synagogal music. All his works are consecrated to the Synagogue. A mountain of original hymns and prayers have left his pen, constantly reminiscent of ancient Hebrew music, which is

its greatest fault, for where is our progress if our composers do nothing more momentous than imitating a music of two and more thousand years ago?

In Palestine there is one other significant force working for synagogal music. He is Solomon Rosovsky, director of the Jewish Conservatory at Tel-Aviv. Rosovsky's father was a cantor for half a century, and the composer absorbed Hebrew music from the very day of his birth. In his music the synagogue element is overwhelmingly predominant. This is profoundly religious music on a large scale. His "Kaddish," his "Nigun on a Sob," are permeated with the spirit of divine worship and expressed in an unfaltering and decisive musical language.

The overwhelming majority of Jewish composers in this movement are, however, not interested in synagogue music. Religious worship, in music, does not appeal to them. Their sole ideal is to express the Jew in music, his striving, his ideals, his suffering. They do not imitate the ancient Hebrew folk-music and ritual hymns; they merely absorb its spirit. They utilize the most advanced techniques and musical forms and try to express a message that is unique to the Jew.

The first of these composers, chronologically and in importance, was Ernest Bloch, a Swiss Jew, who has lived so long in America that he is considered an American composer. Years ago he wrote: "I am a Jew. I aspire to write Jewish music, not for the sake of self-advertisement, but because it is the only way I can produce a music of ability and significance—if I can do such a thing at all. Racial consciousness is absolutely necessary in great music even though nationalism is not." Ernest Bloch

hurled himself into the composition of Hebrew music. Therein did he find himself; therein did he find his strength and his greatness.

Ernest Bloch has been reared in classicism. The C-sharp Symphony, composed at the age of twenty-one, is in form and technique strictly orthodox. A lad stands at the brink of life, wonders what it has in store for him, gasps at its complexity. The gasp is the C-sharp Minor Symphony. There are pages in that work that reveal the unmistakable fingerprints of Wagner, Brahms, Richard Strauss; but in development it is distinctly Ernest Bloch. All the fragile delicacy, the compactness, the sincerity that characterize the later works of Bloch are to be found in this early symphony. The voice, here, may be the voice of others, but the hand is unmistakably the hand of Bloch.

Nor does the voice become Bloch's until he turns his hand towards the composition of Hebrew music. It is in this music alone that he became himself—a lone voice singing a poignant message in music. In such works as "Three Jewish Poems," "Schelomo," "Hebrew Quartet" and the "Israel Symphony," Bloch does not utilize ancient Jewish modes but rather attempts to interpret the Jew through the medium of classical music. By use of numerous trumpet-blasts, strange intervals of one-quarter notes that resemble, curiously enough, the inflexion of the Hebrew tongue, sharp dissonances that seem to cry out piercingly like an anguished utterance of a wounded soul, he has attempted to paint the soul of the Jew. We have, perhaps, in "Israel Symphony" an epitome of Bloch's achievements in Hebrew music. The symphony is vibrant with the Hebrew spirit. The terrible pathos of a race doomed

to two thousand years of exile and persecution; the nympholeptic ideals of a nation whose head is raised high and aloft despite its multifarious misfortunes; the heroism, the grandeur, the sublimity—all this can be heard distinctly in the symphony. "There are moments," poetizes Mr. Paul Rosenfeld, "when one hears in this music the harsh and haughty accents of the Hebrew tongue, sees the abrupt gesture of the Hebrew soul, feels the titanic burst of energy that created the race and carried it intact across the land and times and out of the eternal Egypt and through the eternal Red Sea. There are moments when this music makes one feel as though an element that had remained unchanged throughout three thousand years; an element that is in every Jew and by which every Jew must know himself and his descent, were caught and fixed there."

More recently, Ernest Bloch's works have dropped their Hebrew nomenclatures, but (with the exception of his symphony, "America") they are no less Hebrew in spirit and in content. The "Concerto Grosso" and the Quintet (the latter, perhaps one of the greatest works of our time) speak unmistakably in the sharp tongue of the Jew. The Quintet, for example, is a profoundly religious document, but its religion does not consist in glittering exteriors. It consists rather of the religion of philosophers. Through its harmonies, Spinoza trumpets his intellectual love of God. The meditative mysticism in the heart of every true, pious Jew speaks in the cool counterpoint. The religion of the Quintet purifies and exalts. It shows us more clearly than ever, it gives us suddenly and mysteriously, a glimpse of the true soul of our religion.

But the Quintet is something infinitely more than merely

great Hebrew music. It is also one of the most beautiful musical creations of our time. The music of the Quintet seems to have flowed directly from Ernest Bloch's heart. There is not a note there that seems to have required perspiration and labor. Like all great art, the Quintet appears to be a spontaneous flow of beauty. The music is not, like that of many of our moderns, a nauseating rationalization of the composer's theories. The dissonances fit aptly and gracefully. Even so futuristic a device as playing upon the bridge of a stringed instrument—as the piano thunders out the main theme—seems to be an inevitable portion of an inevitable whole. The Quintet does not dabble with experimental tones and chords. It is a complete and chiselled whole. It is the ringing message of a prophet that finds a fitting vehicle for its eloquent utterance.

The influence of Ernest Bloch on younger American composers has been considerable. What the Russians did to inspire Saminsky and Bloch and Rosovsky, Ernest Bloch, in turn, did for younger American composers. Aaron Copland, a young American composer of fine talent, composed "Vitebsk," a trio, built about a venerable Hebrew melody crooned in Vitebsk, Russia. The melody, itself—a famous Hebrew folk-song crooned for generations—is beautiful and poignant. But in Mr. Copland's trio it is a trite and petty affair. His stretches of unrelated intervals in the very opening of the work are nothing but ugly stammers; the presentation, at last, of the Hebrew melody is ineffective. It stands awkward and grotesque, as though conscious of its own nudity. Nicolai Berezowsky, a mem-



ber of the Greek Orthodox Church, has tried his hand at Hebrew music, too. His Hebrew Suite is, it is clear, the work of a Christian. Mr. Berezowsky's opinion, obviously enough, is that the Jew is some quaint creature with odd mannerisms and curious customs. His music is full of absurd eccentricities, foolish twists of melodies. Mr. Berezowky tries to copy the more obvious mannerisms of the Hebrew folk-songs. The result is pathetic. Joseph Achron, who attained great popularity because of his widely-heard and widely-performed "Hebrew Melody," composed a Hebrew Violin Concerto—Hebrew music diluted with water; Efrem Zimbalist composed a "Hebraische Lied und Tanze"; Leo Sowerby composed several Hebrew chorales.

And even outside of America, prominent composers turned their hand towards the creation of a Hebrew music. Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, a young Italian composer, whose penchant is for modernism but whose personal idiom is not yet decided, composed a "Tre Corali sur une Melodie Ebraiche," which, although built about a genuinely Hebrew tune, consists of so much water. There is no color here, no taste. This is merely the work of an academician who enjoys playing with a technique he has recently learned. Maurice Ravel, one of the great figures in modern music and a powerful force in the neo-classical movement which is influencing all the younger French composers, has given to the repertoire of modern Hebrew music a few Jewish folk-songs. These are cleverly modelled after the synagogal chant; it seems almost as if there is no form here—just as there is no form to the ancient Hebrew music—and that these songs are as plastically and

as freely built. But what has Ravel accomplished but a feeble imitation of music which we already have? Milhaud's numerous attempts at Hebrew music have all achieved the same result. Such works as "Israel est Vivant" or "Six Popular Hebrew Melodies" or "Hymne de Sion" are, obviously, the work of a foreigner. None of the religious ecstasy or the sad brooding of the Jew is here captured. There is in these works a rich flow of complacent melody, skillfully developed, but the melody is distinctly French in form, reminiscent of the idiom of the French six.

It will be seen from this study of modern Hebrew music that—with the exception of the felicitous work of the Russians and of Ernest Bloch—the efforts of the great composers to create Hebrew music has resulted in dismal failure. Where does the fault lie? Certainly, many of these composers are inspired artists who, in other idioms, have given us music of importance and beauty. Is, then, the task of composing Hebrew music in larger forms a hopeless task for the average great composer?

One suspects that the fault lies with the composers. After all, these modern Jewish composers have very little in common with their race—I am alluding, of course, to such musicians as Ravel, Milhaud, Copland and Castelnuovo-Tedesco. They are Jews merely by accident of birth, and some of them—such as Ravel and Nicolai Berezowsky—are not Jews at all. Their interest in matters Jewish is more intellectual than emotional. Having looked at an historic past, they are held spellbound by its glamour and picturesqueness and something awakened in their

bosom which made them happy that they were part of this glorious tradition. But there was none of that spiritual bond to tie them to Judaism; they do not feel or understand the religion or the distinct culture it has produced. They do not feel or even know its spirit. They remain nothing more than "outside looking in."

I emphasize this point because I feel that here does the trouble lie. How can such a people, who have no spiritual ties with the Hebrew race, hope to express such an intangible thing as the Hebrew spirit in their music, when they themselves do not know or feel this spirit? We have noticed that their music is, usually, Hebrew music only in exteriors, in superficial details. It is, in other words, a *goy* parading in *talith* and *tefillin*. And a *goy* it must remain, I am afraid, because their makers had been, despite the accident of birth, *goyim*.

It is significant and interesting to clarify this point. There are those who have recently pointed an accusing finger at Hebrew music and who exclaim that no such thing is possible, forgetting that such men as Kreyn and Ernest Bloch have succeeded beautifully. Have not such superb musicians as Ravel and Milhaud failed in this very task, they argue. Ravel and Milhaud have failed in this monumental task and all other composers will fail in it, too—that is, all who are not truly Jewish in heart. The task of creating great Hebrew music, I am convinced, belongs to a great Jew as well as to a great musician. Until now, these two lines have not met. But when they do—and the day, thanks to the remarkable experimental work of these Jewish composers in this idiom, cannot be very far off—then perhaps we, too, will have our Bach.

## IX

### HEBREW MUSIC: A PROBLEM AND A SOLUTION

NOTWITHSTANDING the few successful efforts of Ernest Bloch and the younger Russians, the pathetic truth remains that Hebrew music is rapidly becoming faded and obsolescent. Its history may be long but, unfortunately, it is not so interesting as it is long. More than four thousand years has it existed, but for more than three-quarters of that time has its development stood still. While the music of the ancient nations was yet in a highly abortive state, Hebrew music was already on a high level of development. For where, among all the nations of the ancient world, can you find the counterpart of Solomon's "Song of Songs" in which the music of the poetry itself is as rich, as ecstatic, as full of passion and power as many a symphony? But this leadership of the Hebrews in the world of music was merely ephemeral, and before long Hebrew music began to appear drab and primitive in comparison with the music of other nations. After all, it is only in the past four hundred years that music has really become an art. But during these years of vital experimentation, of development, of healthy growth for music in general, the music of the Hebrews has remained buried within the walls of the synagogue; there it has remained throughout these many years, im-

mune to any exotic touch, uninfluenced by any foreign element. Polyphonic music may have reached a peak in technical complexity and ingenuity under the fingers of Frescovaldi and Johann Sebastian Bach; Mozart and Beethoven may have enriched the harmonic baggage; Schubert and Schumann may have made the melodic-line more flexible and original; Wagner may have made music a greater organ of expression—but all this had made little difference to Hebrew music. Despite all the changes through which the history of music has passed, Hebrew music has remained its own unique self—having lost none of its peculiar individuality, it is true, but, in return, having surrendered all that marvelous technique and ideas which have become music's heritage. That, I am afraid, has been a terrible sacrifice.

There is something pathetic about the fact that the Hebrew music of today (and we must always remember that our Hebrew music today is epitomized by our synagogal music and not by the one or two successful works of Ernest Bloch!) should be, for the most part, on no higher stage of development than the music of the Holy Temple during Solomon's reign. The melodies are the same, for the most part, and constructed almost to the self-same scales, and many of our traditional tunes are almost as old as the First Temple. Antiphony is still with us, even though the world has learned that antiphonal singing is crude. Harmony is still threadbare and naked as it was in the days of Solomon. And in one respect, even, Hebrew music has gone steps backward—for the Temple, we know, was equipped with a full orchestra of musical instruments while Hebrew music, today, consists pri-

marily of the voice. Hebrew music, consequently, in one respect, has actually gone a step backwards, from the developed to the aboriginal stage in the last three thousand years; in many other respects it has stood still. This, then, is the problem—and before one can hope to solve it, one must be cognizant of its existence. Hebrew music, the regrettable fact remains, is still in its primitive period.

Where, then, does the trouble lie—and what is its remedy?

Before attempting to discover the ailment or to seek any remedies, it might be wise to analyze and understand what Hebrew music is. There are two types of Hebrew music existing today, and one should draw a sharp distinction between them at once. There is the type, which for convenience I shall call by the clumsy nomenclature of "Hebrew-religious music"; the second type I shall give the equally clumsy title of "Hebrew-secular music." But no matter what name we give to them, these two types exist. The first type is a product of the Biblical days, consisting of the music we sing to prayers, to Psalms and to portions from the *Torah*; it consists of the accepted rules and conventions of Hebrew music four thousand years old. The other type utilizes the musical forms and habits of the day to express the Hebrew soul "psychologically," to interpret in the plastic and expressive mould of music, the ideals, emotions and ideas that are to be found in every Jew. Nor is this distinction merely a chronological one. Salamone Rossi, a talented contrapuntalist of the seventeenth century, composed the "Hebrew-secular music" at a time when Spain was giving birth to a healthy crop of Hebrew religious

works. And in our own day, when Hebrew-secular music is so very efflorescent, a few Jews are painfully conceiving honest and unadulterated Hebrew music.

In recent years there has been such a preponderance of this "Hebrew-secular music" that many writers have seen in this the birth of a new movement: a sort of renaissance of Hebrew music. But we have also seen that except for a few works—those of Ernest Bloch and the younger Russians—this movement has not been very fruitful. But had this movement done nothing else it has succeeded in conclusively proving one thing: It has shown us that if we are to have a great Hebrew music, in the "Hebrew-religious" music must we find it.

We seem to be running in an endless circle. Our conclusion now is that only in "Hebrew-religious" music lies our musical salvation and yet, only a few hundred words ago, we lamented that this "Hebrew-religious" music was primitive. "Hebrew-religious" music is primitive—technically. The implements of composition, the method of presentation are obsolescent by thousands of years. But there is a decided value to this Hebrew music, for in spirit it is sublime. Hebrew music is of the same haunting beauty as Negro Spirituals, for example, because in its threadbare simplicity does it reveal the spirit and the soul of a race. In its poignant melodic line, in its uncontrollable rhythms, do we find an expression and an interpretation of the Jewish spirit.

Why, then, should not a music with a spirit so lofty attain the highest peaks of sublimity—perhaps, even, peaks never yet attained? Why, then, should not Hebrew music utilize a development technical equipment when, utilizing

it, it can easily assume the cloak of imperishable greatness?

Yes, there is a remedy in sight.

The first solution is not an easy one. We must be prepared to introduce new music into the Synagogue and to replace all the dusty music that is now entrapped in it. Then we must overcome the terrible prejudice which exists against elaborate music in the Synagogue. The Temple of King Solomon had a full orchestra of instruments. Why not we, too? The introduction of an orchestra into the services would cause music to make a miraculous development. For it would mean the introduction of a highly-complex music and would have to enlist the services of only experienced musicians. Also, we must no longer permit the cantor to compose his own music. The cantor has his position because he has an agreeable voice, and not because he is a gifted composer. Some cantors, as a matter of fact, are pathetically inept. If, however, each cantor were given music to sing—music composed by thorough musicians who know their business—the caliber of Hebrew music would develop. And if this music were performed under the direction of such skillful musicians as Lazare Saminsky, for example, can you not see the almost miraculous transformation that would come over the music of the Synagogue?

The final remedy must pertain to the composers themselves. Some of the greatest treasures in music are church compositions. Bach's Passions and Masses, Cherubini's and Mozart's Requiems, Handel's Messiah, how is it that Jewish composers have never turned their efforts to the composition of similar works built around Hebrew prayers, too? I can very well imagine a sublime threnody



like Mozart's Requiem composed by the hand of the Jew and built around the words of our own *Kaddish*, composed, perhaps, for solo voices, chorus and orchestra. And there are any number of prayers in our prayer book which beg and cry for such treatment. Take, as another example, our *K'dusha* sung by the cantor and congregation during each *Sh'moneh Esreh*. How marvelously that would lend itself to elaborate polyphonic treatment! Our *K'dusha* could easily become the Jewish mass or Passion, if it were treated by a gifted composer. There are moments of tenderness, majesty, passion here; there are lines which lend themselves brilliantly to fugal treatment, lines of drama and power. In fact, one of the lines in our *K'dusha* appears, sometimes brilliantly, too, in all Requiems. I am alluding to *Kodosh, Kodosh Kodosh, Adonoi Tz'vo-oth*, which becomes, in the Latin requiems, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus!*

In this manner we could produce profound music, too—for music has proved to be most receptive to the expression of religion. True, love and pathos can inspire the music of the heavens, too, but the music that strikes the profoundest depths, the music that is most eternal and most poignant is that music which speaks about the awe, the mystery and the grandeur that is in the heart of every true worshipper. Love may have produced the second act of *Tristan*; pathos may have given birth to those heart-breaking slow movements of Beethoven—and there will be none to say that this is not great music. But not even this music can reach the human heart so surely and so grippingly as some of the pathetic religious cries of Bach and Mozart.

It is time, therefore, that some of these religious cries became Jewish. What the Catholic Church has done to music is well known. Will the Jewish Synagogue be just as fruitful? The answer lies with the famous Jewish composers. If, instead of trying to interpret the Jew psychologically, or attempting to create a Hebrew music by toying with some fragmentary Jewish theme, our Jewish composers should turn their attention into this channel, the results, I am sure, would be breath-taking. The prayer book swarms with such prayers which can be used effectively for soloists, choruses and orchestra. We, too, can have vast contrapuntal music, grandiose musical architectures, but only if our composers will begin to absorb themselves with this material. Sublime utterances await their pen; it is high time that they became cognizant of them.

All this, I confess, is somewhat difficult. It cannot be achieved with one stroke of the pen; nor can it be attained in a few weeks. Moreover, it requires patience and work and zeal. Ernest Bloch, I understand, is now beginning to retrace his steps and, despite his success in the Hebrew-secular music, is discovering the truth and turning his pen towards creating music only for the Synagogue. This is a beginning. And with such a handsome beginning, Hebrew music should, at last, begin its long march towards sublimity.

















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